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Department of Public Instruction
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GUEST EDITORIAL

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Educators act courageously everyday

By State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

The events that unfolded Friday, Sept. 29, in the Weston School District have shaken that community and every community in our state and nation. Our hearts go out to the family of slain Principal John Klang and to the staff, students, and families of the Weston School District.

Through tragedies such as this, we see heroes. Custodian Dave Thompson acted decisively in first responding to the armed student. Teacher Charles Keller ensured that 911 was called and the schools' emergency lockdown procedure was activated. Principal Klang remained focused on protecting the health and safety of his students and staff in spite of mortal injuries. And in the immediate aftermath, District Administrator Terry Milfred and Dean of Students Melissa Nigh drew the community together with compassion. There were others who acted courageously that day who deserve our thanks and praise.

Thankfully, tragic events in schools are very rare. The heroes we saw in the Weston School District, however, are not rare in any school community. Educators act courageously on behalf of our students everyday.

Our educators work to build a safe school climate where all students feel valued and a part of the school community. They make the elimination of the bullying, shunning, and harassment that contributes to an unsafe school climate a high priority. They work to build a culture of trusting relationships that includes communication between and among students and adults. They intervene in situations large and small to help students learn skills to prevent and avoid negative behaviors. And, our educators bring compassion to their work that is tied to firmness so our students know their safety is important and that adults will act to keep them safe and engaged in school.

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Educators alone cannot create a safe school climate. Safe schools require the efforts of parents and families, business and industry, civic leaders, law enforcement, and elected officials, working together to ensure that every child feels connected, every child knows someone cares about them and their education. We must all reach out to create a community that values our students.

John Klang devoted his time and energy to the children of the Weston School District. He built lasting relationships. As we gathered in the Weston gymnasium to celebrate the life of a hero, we remembered John Klang as a shepherd. He worked and lived tirelessly for his family, students, staff, and community right through until his final courageous act.

The Weston School District community is still grieving the loss of a beloved leader and educator. As I joined the community in working through shock and healing, I saw courage: the courage to reopen for classes despite pain, the courage to reschedule homecoming with hope, and the courage to remember a departed friend. The real courage will be in the healing process.

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Elizabeth Burmaster is the elected state superintendent of public instruction.

NOTES: The state superintendent's new, high-resolution photo is available on the Department of Public Instruction "Media Contacts and Resources" webpage at < <http://dpi.wisconsin.gov/eis/vm-media.html> >. Additional information on school safety is available at < <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sspw/safeschool.html> >.

This guest editorial is available electronically at < http://www.dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpi2006_127.pdf >.